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Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs Committee

Environment Subcommittee
Ethics and Election Law Subcommittee

Special Committee on Renewables and
Clean Energy

Special Committee on Substance
Abuse

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Subcommittee on Open Space /
Agricultural Land Preservation



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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

December 20, 2007

The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Governor
State House, 2nd Floor
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr.
President of Senate
State House, H-107
Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1991

The Honorable Michael E. Busch
Speaker of House of Delegates
State House, H-101
Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1991

Re: SB476/Ch. 333, 2007 (MSAR # 6585)

Dear Governor O'Malley, Senator Miller and Delegate Busch:

I am writing to provide a status report on the progress of the Task Force to Study Group Home Education and Placement Practices as required in Senate Bill 476 from the 2007 legislative session.

All of the required representatives have been appointed and the Task Force has been meeting monthly to study the issues required in the legislation. The Task Force has reviewed legislation relating to group homes from the last eight years to get a historical perspective of issues. The Task Force has also looked at a considerable amount of information on a broad range of group home issues such as the number of group homes in the state and their locations, the licensing and contracting processes, placement issues and access to appropriate education. To date, the Task Force has had presentations by each of the licensing agencies, the Governor's Office for Children, the Legal Aid Bureau and the Maryland Health Care Commission.

Four workgroups have been formed to study the following specific issues:

1. Determine whether the definitions of various service categories under the umbrella of "residential child care programs" are too broad and accurately reflect services provided.
2. Alternative procurement methods that may allow the state to better control the growth of group care facilities based on need.
3. The impact that educational factors have on placement decisions and outcomes for youth, as well as the impact group homes have on local school systems.
4. What the state expects group homes to deliver in regards to the needs of youth placed in them.

The Task Force will continue to meet to study these complex issues with a goal of making recommendations for reform measures that will create a "right sized" system that is responsive to the needs of the state and is better equipped to deliver services that will result in improved outcomes for youth in out of home placement.

At this time, it is the intention of the Task Force to conclude its work in time to submit the final report that will meet the legislation's requirements by December 1, 2008.

Sincerely,



Bobby A. Zirkin

Senator, District 11 Baltimore County

Chair, Task Force to Study Group Home Education and Placement Practices

Cc: David Treasure, Department of Budget and Management
Clarke Williams, Department of Budget and Management
Steve McCulloch, Department of Legislative Services
Cathy Kramer, Department of Legislative Services
Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services